

AN OPPORTUNITY *

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Opportunity is from within. In proportion as we develop the ideal life so are we quick to grasp the opportunities for service lying all about us. The greatest life ever lived was one of implicit obedience to that inner law which raised the most lowly tasks for humanity into the realm of divine service. And this service is our heritage.

In March, 1904, a call was sent out from the Surgeon-General's office for graduate nurses who would volunteer their services to the United States in the event of war or national calamity. Certain papers have to be made out by the applicant and the superintendent of her training school, which, with a written report twice yearly of her physical condition and place of residence, are to be submitted to the Surgeon-General. The only obligation is a willingness to respond when the emergency arises.

During the first six months subsequent to the issuance of this call, but six nurses volunteered their services! Up to August of this year one hundred and seventy-four application blanks were sent out, of which forty-two have been returned, and, as one of this number was not recommended by her superintendent, the volunteer list now has the names of forty-one nurses who are willing to serve their country in time of need. A fact worth mentioning is that eighteen of the forty-one are already in the service.

From the thirty thousand nurses more or less, in the United States suppose we take two-thirds who, for various reasons, are incapacitated for volunteer service. This leaves ten thousand persons in the profession and out of this number only forty-one are available.

The confusion and dissatisfaction connected with the nursing service of the Spanish-American war are well known facts, hence the wisdom in providing against a repetition of such a disastrous experience. In an emergency there is no time for careful investigation, so the useless become plentifully mixed with the good. In the weeks of self-denial and hard work the chaff is always winnowed out but it is at expense of the patients and the profession that this winnowing is accomplished. The same nurse who walks worthy the vocation she has chosen often fails to recognize and properly adjust the fact that unprofessional

* Read at the meeting of the Colorado State Nurses' Association.

conduct on the part of a sister nurse leaves its impress upon her. We are all part of a whole for "no man liveth to himself." Then is there not something lacking in the professional character of the nurse who sits calmly down to her every-day duties, permitting a call like this to go by unheeded?

We say we love our profession; we utter loving sentiments for our country, and this is right; yet the love which finds no expression, save in words, is like the mist which flees before the light of day. If we loved our profession and country in sincerity and in truth the eligible volunteer list would number its names in the thousands instead of the tens.

The cry of the age is—"What can I get?" And, alas, the nursing profession is not exempt from this sin! We can take nothing out until we first put something in, for we receive in proportion to what we give. We fail to see that by giving we keep, and what we thus keep is the best part of what we gave. The highest obligation we can ever hope to fulfil is rendering service to those who lack what we have to give. That you and I are good nurses is cause for no praise, for we are only what we should be. God gave us the powers whereby it was possible by their use, to become what we are. Then, rather, we are the debtors.

We, who are living in this land, have, as if it were our birth-right, a system of public education excelled by no other country, the power of thought, the freedom of open speech, the opportunity to rise to any position open to man, and the right to claim the protection of a government whose strength and power are recognized the world over. Do we owe *nothing* to the United States in return for all this? When our Army Department requests a volunteer list from which to draw in time of need, are the graduate nurses of this land justified in sitting down and letting this call go by unheeded? Emphatically, no! The obligations of this call are so easy of fulfilment that it is appalling to note the few who have responded.

We need to do some serious thinking upon this subject. Our country has a right to our services; she has the right to even *demand* that our services be given, but instead, the call comes in the form of a request—just as the best things in life always come—leaving us free to do the noble part because we are so high-minded that we see the need for action.

"Every common hush is a fire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes!"

[On November 2, there were 52 nurses enrolled on the Eligible-Volunteers list.—Ed.]